

Message Text

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FOR IEU; STATE FOR EUR/SOV; USIS/BONN; P&C LENINGRAD; VOA/MUNICH

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SUBJECT: HOPKINS/OBOLENSKY VISA SUPPORT

REF: (A) USIA 35442 (B) MOSCOW 18849

1. EMBASSY EXTREMELY PLEASED TO LEARN (REFTEL B) SOVIETS NOW APPARENTLY PREPARED TO ISSUE HOPKINS VISA. WE NOTE THAT IN SEVERAL DISCUSSIONS WITH MFA COUNSELOR FEDOSEYEV ON HOPKINS VISA CASE, LATTER HAD REPEATEDLY OBSERVED THAT "THE MATTER IS COMPLICATED," THAT HOPKINS' REPORTING HAD BEEN CONSIDERED "UNFRIENDLY," AND THAT ENTIRE CASE WOULD BE "LOOKED INTO" BY MFA. FEDOSEYEV DID NOTE, HOWEVER, THAT SUPPORT FOR HOPKINS IN WASHINGTON MIGHT HAVE POSITIVE EFFECT.

2. IN LIGHT OF THIS LAST COMMENT, EMBASSY WOULD BE MOST INTERESTED TO LEARN WHAT APPROACH DEPARTMENT AND AGENCY USED WITH SOVIET EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON. TO DATE, WE HAVE RECEIVED NO INFORMATION. WAS OBOLENSKY REFERRED TO? DID RECIPROCAL ACTION AGAINST SOVIET JOURNALIST(S) COME UNDER DISCUSSION?

3. ALTHOUGH WE HOPE HOPKINS' PROBLEM NOW THING OF THE PAST, BEFORE REQUESTING SUPPORT FOR OBOLENSKY VISA APPLICATION,
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EMBASSY BELIEVES THOROUGH REVIEW OF PROCEDURES FOR SUPPORT-

ING APPLICATIONS OF VOA CORRESPONDENTS IS IN ORDER. OUR CURRENT SOP BASED ON OUR UNDERSTANDING OF INFORMAL ARRANGEMENT REACHED IN WASHINGTON SOME YEARS AGO BETWEEN EUR/SOV, USIA ON ONE HAND AND SOVIET EMBASSY. OUR RECOLLECTION IS THAT HOPKINS, AS VOA CORRESPONDENT BASED IN BELGRADE, DID NOT RECEIVE VISA TO USSR UNTIL THIS ARRANGEMENT REACHED, I.E., THAT VISA APPLICATION WOULD BE WITH OFFICIAL PASSPORT THOUGH HOPKINS' JOURNALISTIC PURPOSE WOULD BE CLEARLY STATED. VISA SUPPORT IN MOSCOW WOULD BE MADE FOR USG EMPLOYEE NOT FOR PURPOSES REPORTING. IN SHORT, SOVIETS WERE ACCEPTING HOPKINS VISA APPLICATION AS USG OFFICIAL AND ACTING ON EMBASSY REQUEST FOR TDY ASSIGNMENT BUT TAKING OFFICIAL COGNIZANCE OF HOPKINS' STATED PURPOSE. IT WAS FURTHER UNDERSTOOD THAT HE WOULD BE ALLOWED TO ACT AS JOURNALIST DURING HIS VISITS (E.G., ACCREDITATION TO PRESS CENTERS, SUCH AS GRANTED TO EMBOFFS, FILING OF STORIES BY PHONE, ETC). THIS HAS, IN FACT, BEEN THE CASE. IF OUR UNDERSTANDING INCORRECT, PLEASE ADVISE.

4. THAT SOVIET UNDERSTANDING OF THIS PROCEDURE IS AS DESCRIBED ABOVE IS SUPPORTED BY FACT THAT SOVIET MFA OFFICIALS TOOK GREAT PAINS TO POINT OUT DIFFERENCE (IN THEIR EYES) BETWEEN HOPKINS AND SAFIR. SAFIR, THEY MAINTAINED, IS "MERELY" A VOA EMPLOYEE. (EMBASSY'S LOSING DEBATE ON BEHALF OF SAFIR DETAILED IN MOSCOW'S 3020 AND 4250). IN OTHER WORDS, HOPKINS IS (OR WAS) ACCEPTED AS A GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL. MFA/PRESS OFFICIAL REITERATED THIS POSITION WHEN EMBOFFS CALLED TO REPORT RECENT STATEMENT BY MFA/CONSULAR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL THAT HOPKINS WAS JOURNALIST AND SHOULD BE HANDLED BY MFA/PRESS (MOSCOW 17747). COMMENT BY MFA/PRESS WAS THAT HOPKINS VISA APPLICATION SHOULD BE HANDLED "AS USUAL," I.E., AS USG OFFICIAL ON TDY TO EMBASSY, THUS BY MFA/CONSULAR. THISBUCK PASSING WAS NOTED VERBALLY TO FEDOSEYEV IN THE COURSE OF THE SEVERAL DISCUSSIONS RECENTLY REPORTED.

5. RE PARA 2, REFTTEL A, EMBASSY FOR PAST YEAR AND HALF HAS NOT REGULARLY SUPPORTED JOURNALISTS VISA APPLICATIONS ONLY CASE WHICH COME TO MIND IS UPI'S HOWARD TYNER, WHO HAD PROBLEMS IN TRYING TO ENTER USSE BY SURFACE FROM POLAND. EMBASSY ALWAYS READY TO SUPPORT JOURNALISTS WHEN NEED ARISES, BUT NOT UNTIL SITUATION CALLS FOR IT. ON THE OTHER HAND, WE HAVE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ROUTINELY REQUESTED VISA SUPPORT FOR HOPKINS. EMBASSY NOT AWARE THAT EARLIER EXAMPLES CITED IN REF A PARA 2, WERE PART OF REGULAR PROCESS, OR, IN FACT, THAT ANY PRIVATE CITIZENS RECEIVED EMBASSY SUPPORT WITHOUT REQUESTED NEED. ADVISE IF DEPT. HAS BEEN ROUTINELY SUPPORTING VISA REQUESTS FOR JOURNALISTS OR OTHER NON-OFFICIAL AMCITS.

6. IF WE REQUEST SUPPORT FOR OBOLENSKY USING SAME LANGUAGE

AS IN HER APPLICATION, IN OUR ESTIMATION LEVERAGE OF EMBASSY
TO INSIST ON MFA RESPONSE IS DIMINISHED. IT ALSO APPEARS TO
EMBASSY THAT WE ARE PLAYING RUSSIAN GAME BY REFUSING TO STATE
CLEARLY THAT VOA CORRESPONDENTS ARE USG EMPLOYEES. IF HOPKINS
HAD BEEN GRANTED VISA AND THEN ENCOUNTERED PROBLEMS IN CARRY-
ING OUT REPORTING FROM USSR, THIS WOULD BE ANOTHER SITUATION
AND CALL FOR ANOTHER RESPONSE ON OUR PART. IF WE NOW SHIFT
VISA SUPPORT WORKING FROM TRAVEL AS GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL TO SOMETHING
ELSE, WE MAY UNWITTINGLY CREATE UNNECESSARY BUREAUCRATIC PROBLEM
ON SIVLET SIDE. IN SUM, WE BELIEVE SOVIETS
ARE STILL OPERATING ON SAME UNDERSTANDING REACHED EARLIER RE-
GARDING USIA EMPLOYEES WHO ARE VOA CORRESPONDENTS.

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